

Statement of Senator John McCain
Hearing on S.97, Children's Internet Protection Act
March 4, 1999

Let me begin by thanking our witnesses for taking time from your lives and business to appear here today. This is a very important issue for our nation's children and for this Committee. Your presence is appreciated.

S.97, the legislation which is the topic of this hearing, is basically the same Internet filtering bill reported out of this Committee in the last Congress. The bill requires schools and libraries taking advantage of the E-rate subsidy to deploy blocking or filtering software on computers that kids are going to use. It is left to local authorities to decide what content is blocked or filtered.

Today, there are generally only three ways a child can gain access to the Internet; in the home, at school, or in a library. This legislation is not about what happens in the home. Parents must be involved in what their children do and see on-line when they're at home. The question this bill seeks to address is: What happens when that parent entrusts the welfare of their child to a school or library? Parents have the right to feel safe that, when they send their child to school, when they drop their child off at the public library, someone is going to be looking out for their children, protecting them. That's what this bill is all about.

During consideration of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the Senate included an amendment establishing the E-rate, a subsidy for schools and libraries to get connected to the Internet. Senators Snowe and Rockefeller shepherded that program through the Senate. Last year, the first program year, the Schools and Libraries Association awarded \$1.66 billion to nearly 26,000 school and library applications for the E-rate subsidy. What that means is a lot of kids are going to be coming on-line very quickly. That is a very good thing. Children in Chinlee, Arizona will now have the same access to the Internet as those in Scottsdale. However, this coming wave creates a growing urgency to get this legislation passed, and get these protections into place before our nation's children begin to log-on en masse.

I have an article from the Los Angeles Times, dated February 12, 1999. The headline reads: Man Uses Los Angeles' Main Library to Send Child Porn Here's what it says:

A 45-year-old man who used computers at the city's main library to send child pornography was arrested in a sting operation where he believed he would be having sex with kids as young as 3, police said.

The article goes on:

He would go to the Los Angeles Central Library as soon as it opened up and signed

up to use each computer on each floor...From there he maintained his Web site, while e-mailing and communicating with members of his club.

This is insane. It is incredible to me that anyone would do such a thing. But the sad reality is that child stalkers and molesters are using the Internet to sell their goods and to stalk our children.

Another article, titled: Computer Porn Shock at School:

Five A-level students used their school's computers to download hardcore pornography from the Internet.

I could go on, but I think we all know what the problem here is.

The bottom line is, with implementation of the E-rate, tens-of-thousands of children are going to be accessing the Internet. With this explosion comes a corresponding increase in risk. The government, in creating this policy assumes the compelling interest in protecting the children who benefit from it. Schools and libraries, in subscribing to the E-rate program, assume the responsibility for providing a front-line protection policy for children who utilize their computers to access the Internet. If they don't want this responsibility, the answer is simple, don't take the subsidy.